

**Leigh Memorial Congregation
Parramatta Mission
Uniting Church in Australia
Palm Sunday
5 April 2020**

(To stop the spread of Corona virus, in response to Government's ban and Uniting Church of Australia NSW & ACT Synod's strong recommendation, the Church Council of Parramatta Mission have decided to suspend all meetings and gatherings including Sunday worship. As a result, this is the first time in the 135 years of its history Leigh Memorial's doors are not open for worship services until further notice.

Here is a full worship service including a reflection prepared by Leigh Memorial Congregation minister, Rev Dr Manas Ghosh for the Palm Sunday, 5.4.2020. for people to worship from the safety of their home. The *Prayers of the People* mainly focusses on corona virus, its effect on people and seeking God's grace to cope with it, and you are encouraged to bring your own prayers. The hymns/songs can be said as prayers if not possible for solo/family singing. Have a blessed worship!)

(Before you begin your worship today, if possible get a palm branch or two, or any other greenery, put them on the table where you come to worship, and imagine that you are there at the city of Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday with others, waving palm branches to welcome Jesus.)



Opening Prayer: (If possible please hold a palm branch or any greenery as you pray the following prayer)

Hosanna! Hosanna!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!
Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

Come, O Lord of the universe,
to our corona virus afflicted world
with your mercy and grace.

Come, O Saviour of the world,
to our anxious and fearful locked down cities
with your healing and hope.

Come, O Eternal Friend,
to our social isolation
with your warmth and peace.

Come, O Jesus Christ,
come beside me,
hold my hand
and walk with me. Amen.

Greetings:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Hymn: Together in Song 348

Ride on, ride on in majesty;
hark, all the tribes hosanna cry!
O Saviour; meek, pursue your road
with palms and scattered garments strowed.

Ride on, ride on in majesty;
 in lowly pomp ride on to die;
 O Christ, your triumphs now begin
 o'er captive death and conquered sin.

Ride on, ride on in majesty;
 the winged squadrons of the sky
 look down with sad and wondering eyes
 to see the approaching sacrifice.

Ride on, ride on in majesty;
 your last and fiercest strife is nigh;
 the Father on his sapphire throne
 awaits his own anointed Son.

Ride on, ride on in majesty;
 in lowly pomp ride on to die;
 bow your meek head to mortal pain,
 then take, O God, your power and reign!

Prayer of Adoration and Confession:

Holy God,

This morning we gather in our minds at our city square, with palm branches in hands and proclaim, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is the name of the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest" for you are worthy of all glory, praise and honour.

O God, as we remember the story of the first Palm Sunday we are mindful that much of the crowd that lined the streets that day singing Hosannas to him, turned on him within days, shouting "Crucify him". Knowing that we too are capable of such behaviour, we pray, help us to keep ourselves consistent in our praise, faithful in our discipleship and steadfast in our loyalty, just as you are consistent, faithful and steadfast in your love, mercy and grace to us. We ask this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Words of Assurance and declaration of Forgiveness:

We are in solidarity with Jesus on this perilous journey to Jerusalem.
 We accept the consequences for faithful decisions for we know
 God will be with us every step of the way.

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us:

Your sins are forgiven.

Praise God. Hosanna in the highest!

The Lord's Prayer: (In the spirit of the Lord's Prayer please feel free to pray
 in our own mother tongue)

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your
 will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.
 Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the
 times of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the
 glory are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

Passing of the Peace: (You may hold your two hands gently for some
 moments and think of those people you would like to pass on the 'Peace of
 the Lord'.)

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

The Service of the Word

Bible Reading:

Psalm 31:9-16

⁹ Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;
 my eye wastes away from grief,
 my soul and body also.

¹⁰ For my life is spent with sorrow,
 and my years with sighing;
 my strength fails because of my misery,
 and my bones waste away.

¹¹ I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
 a horror^[b] to my neighbours,
 an object of dread to my acquaintances;
 those who see me in the street flee from me.
¹² I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;
 I have become like a broken vessel.
¹³ For I hear the whispering of many—
 terror all around!—
 as they scheme together against me,
 as they plot to take my life.

¹⁴ But I trust in you, O LORD;
 I say, “You are my God.”
¹⁵ My times are in your hand;
 deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
¹⁶ Let your face shine upon your servant;
 save me in your steadfast love.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Matthew 21:1-11

21 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” 4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

5 “Tell the daughter of Zion,
 Look, your king is coming to you,
 humble, and mounted on a donkey,
 and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” 11 The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ!

Reflection:

Today is Palm Sunday. In the past on this day children and adults of Leigh Memorial Congregation had marched in procession from the centenary Square in Parramatta to the Leigh Memorial Church, waving palm branches in their hands and shouting “Hosanna”.

This year it’s different. Because of strict social isolation due to Corona virus the Centenary Square is empty, and the church doors are shut. We are a dispersed community. Some of us have joined this worship via zoom and listening to this message. Others are reading this message at home alone. But we are still a church, the “Body of Christ” – worshipping God and celebrating the Palm Sunday.

From the lectionary I’ve picked up two readings – one from the Book of Psalms and the other from the Gospel of Matthew. Both are pertinent for our celebration of this year’s Palm Sunday.

The Gospel reading gives us the picture that most of us are familiar with. On the first Palm Sunday when Jesus, riding on a donkey, entered the city

of Jerusalem with his disciples, according to Mark, the gospel writer, “A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!’”

Although there are some variations of this story as recoded in other gospels, the words of the crowd are the same, or very similar: “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”

The key word “Hosanna” comes from a Hebrew word, “hoshi’a na,” which is translated in Greek as “(h)osanna.” It is a call for rescue. You might call it a chant or a slogan of political nature, for a change in the world. It means, “Save us,” and the “na” at the end of the Hebrew word makes the plea even more intense. It is “Save us NOW!”

This chant or slogan ends with a reference to the “Lord.” And this end bit is significant. Please remember, the crowd in Jerusalem that day were not Christians. Neither was Jesus. They were all Jewish people, and the word ‘Lord’ in a Jewish context is the unpronounced name of the God whose name is “Mercy”, which means that the crowd’s demand “Now” is rooted in a reliance on the God who rules the world by means of Mercy. I think in our celebration of Palm Sunday today that is the key word – “Mercy”.

It was the word they had chanted two thousand years ago, and it is the word we chant fervently today, behind our face mask, or in an isolation ward in ICU – “Save us now, O God, whose name is ‘Mercy.’” This cry is rising from all over the world as people are desperately waiting for “Mercy” to be real.

The Corona virus is wreaking havoc in every part of the world. We are living in a world where there is, as the Psalmist describes in today’s Psalm, “terror all around,” sorrow, sighing, misery, anxiety you name it. All around us the hissing sounds of fear, anxiety, dismay and death are loud and insistent. Bustling cities and towns look like ghost towns. Convoys of military trucks

carrying the dead. Church pews replaced by rows of coffins. Suffering and death, sorrow and sadness, despair and dismay all around.

But does it mean we have to give in and melt in the face of it? After describing all the sorrows and dismays, the Psalmist adds a little yet profoundly powerful “but” at the beginning of verse 14 which refers to a God beyond us, who can be addressed and summoned. This little “but” affirms that we are not left alone in our misery, that there is someone trustworthy who can be summoned – “Save us now, O God, whose name is ‘Mercy.’”

Our Christian faith affirms that this “Mercy” came into the world in human form in Jesus who embodied “Mercy”, and lavished “Mercy” upon one and all. This “Mercy” is creative. This “Mercy” is present. This “Mercy” is engaged with doctors, nurses, health professionals, emergency workers, researchers, scientists, governments, economists, law enforcement authorities, even with ordinary people like you and I to deliver us from this peril. This “Mercy” is with us.

In the midst of his terrible miseries, the Psalmist acknowledges the presence of this “Mercy” as he professes, “But I trust in you, O Lord. You are my God. My times are in your hands.” These are not empty words of self-deceptive comfort, or some religious illusion. These are words of affirmation that God is stronger than our troubles, that God is attentive and God does act. And God does all these because of his steadfast love for us.

Friends, at this point of time in history when all around us is despair and death, this should be the anchor of our hope – the steadfast love of God, which never ceases; whose mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning. The power of this “Mercy” will help us journey through this time of trouble.

This journey is costly. It demands transformation. It demands sacrifice, interdependence, humility, commitment, and solidarity with others especially with those who are weak, poor and vulnerable. We have seen the worst in humans as we witnessed the dunny wars over toilet paper, the way some rich cleared out the supermarkets to stock their freezers. But we

have also seen the beast in some humans. Tears came to my eyes when I saw on TV Mike Flynn, the double amputee man from Brisbane rode his bike 16km to Coles to shop for his blind and bedridden mate. I am grateful to a member of the Leigh Memorial Congregation who brought non-perishable items for our Mealsplus. I thanked God when a gentleman from the Australian Imams Council filled the Mealsplus freezer with foods for the hungry. I thank God when our older members contact other older members over phone and offer company and love. They are embodying “Mercy” to others at this critical time in human history.

Friends as we move into Holy Week and reflect on the life of the One who became “Mercy” incarnate, Jesus Christ, may we embody this “Mercy” and offer mercy to others that we can walk and work together to overcome this difficult time.

“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” Amen!

Offering and Dedication: (You may keep aside your weekly offerings and bring them to the church when it’s possible, or you can talk to one of our office staffs on 98912277 to arrange for a direct debit. Thanks.)

Name above all names,
 as you emptied yourself for others,
 we offer ourselves and these gifts
 as a sign of our hope in your reign.
 Where there is sickness, bring healing,
 Where there is sorrow, bring joy.
 Where there is fear, bring courage.
 Where there is injustice, bring change.
 Where there is violence, bring peace.
 Where there is death, bring life.

Amen.

Prayers of the People:

Let us now join our voices with the never ceasing prayer of Jesus Christ for ourselves, our community and the whole world.

Loving God, the whole world is reeling under the threat of the deadly coronavirus which is causing unprecedented disruption to our normal life – public gatherings of large size including churches have been shut down; people are panic buying; medical professionals are racing to treat those infected and to developing a vaccine. This can be a time of great fear, despair and uncertainty. So today we especially pray for those who are infected with corona virus and affected by it.

Loving God, we pray for those who are suffering from corona virus or facing quarantine. May they feel your power of healing through the care of doctors and nurses. Take away the fear, anxiety, and feelings of isolation from people receiving treatment or under quarantine. Give them a sense of purpose in pursuing health and protecting others from exposure to the disease. Protect their families and friends and bring peace to all who love them.

O God, we pray for those who are at higher risk of developing the disease and more likely than others to become severely ill from this virus – the elderly and people with chronic health conditions. Protect them from harm and be their comfort in this time of uncertainty.

Loving God, we pray for those who are lonely, shut in and isolated that your company, your love may come to their life through our friendship and practical care.

O God, we pray for medical professionals, caregivers, researchers, and leaders responsible for decisions about fighting the new coronavirus. We pray for people making decisions that affect the lives and futures of our families, communities, countries, and the wider world. Inspire and invigorate people developing better tests to diagnose the virus, vaccines to prevent it, and protocols and communication to eliminate the disease's spread. May truth and empathy be the touchstones of people setting policies for our protection.

Loving God, we pray for those whose livelihood have been hampered by the effect of Corona virus – small business people, daily labourers, casual workers, victims of bushfire, drought stricken farmers, travel business

related people just to mention a few. May their employers, the government and all of us may support these people at the time of this crisis.

As we endure this new normal in our lives, we pray earnestly for the heroic medical doctors, nurses, and health care professionals who are putting their lives on the line for helping the sufferers. May you give them strength and physical immunity during this time, so they can help push back against this ravaging virus.

We pray for our Uniting Church – its assembly, NSW and ACT Synod and its agencies and our Parramatta Nepean Presbytery. We pray for Parramatta Mission, our three congregations and the Korean Faith community that through our work at this time of grave difficulty we may bring Christ's hope to the communities.

We now take a few moments and silently pray for members of this church family who are unwell physically, emotionally and spiritually. May your healing touch be upon them that they may be made well and whole. For we ask all these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Sending forth of the People of God

Song: TiS 333

All glory, praise and honour
to you, redeemer, king,
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring.

You are the king of Israel
and David's royal son,
now in the Lord's name coming,
the king and blessed one.

The company of angels
are praising you on high,
and we and all creation

exultant make reply.

The people of the Hebrews
with palms before you went:
our praise and prayer and anthems
before you we present.

To you before your passion
they sang their hymns of praise:
to you now high exalted
our melody we raise.

Their praises you accepted:
accept the prayers we bring,
who in all good take pleasure,
our good and gracious king.

Words of Commission and Benediction:

Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest heaven!
Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!
As you journey to the Cross in this Holy week,
Go with the knowledge
that resurrection will come,
even when it seems there is no tomorrow.
Be blessed and be a blessing,
with the courage to stand with those in need.
In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.
Amen.